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ABSTRACT

The 1982 school board elections in the geographical and political Ottawa-Carleton (Ontario) regions gave rise to a record number of new candidates for election to the two public and two separate school boards that comprise the region. This paper examines some of the reasons for the dramatic increase and develops a profile of their characteristics. Results of an interpretative-theoretical type of qualitative analysis show that neither proposed increases in honoraria nor changes in the term of office (from 2 to 3 years) were factors in candidates' decisions to run. Major concerns and predominant issues which affected their candidacy, in rank order, were: (1) lack of communication by the boards, (2) monetary and taxation concerns, (3) school closures, (4) special education, (5) quality education, and (6) public funding of Catholic education. Many new candidates were deeply concerned with the impersonal community relations of large, bureaucratic school systems and school boards' appointed officials. A great majority of the new candidates came from the upper three classes of society, held at least one university degree, had close associations with education, and had been politically active in the past in some community group or organization. Nine references are appended. Two tables and one figure are included. (IW)

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WHY DID THEY RUN?

by
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INTRODUCTION

The 1982 school board elections in the Ottawa-Carleton Region sparked an unusually high interest among both the present incumbents and a large number of new candidates to seek either re-election or election respectively to the two public and two separate school boards located within the political and geographical region of Ottawa-Carleton. The major purposes of this paper are to determine why a record number of new candidates presented themselves to the electorate for the position of school board trustee in November 1982, and to develop a profile of these candidates.

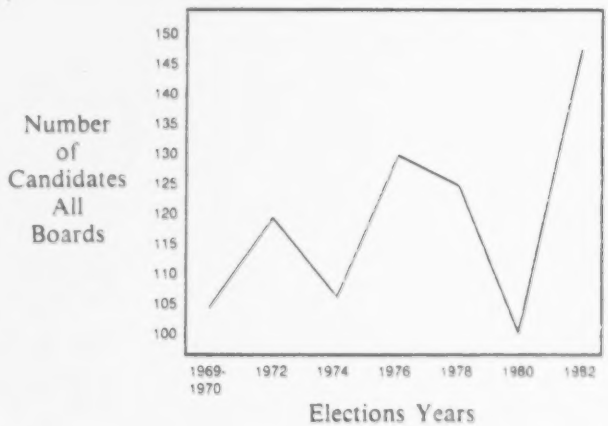
Historically, four relatively large school boards now comprise the Ottawa-Carleton Region. They have been in existence since 1969-1970 when the Government of Ontario created the county school board system and reduced the number of school boards from approximately 1400 to less than 170 larger administrative units including boards of education, separate school boards and district public and separate school boards (Jakes, 1980, p. 172). In this reorganization, the Collegiate Institute Board and the Ottawa Public School Board were forced to merge as the Ottawa Board of Education incorpating the Village of Rockcliffe. The Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board, including the City of Vanier, continued as an administrative unit. Two new school boards were created from the eight townships which surround the city of Ottawa to form the Carleton Board of Education and the Carleton Roman Catholic Separate School Board.

THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES

In order to determine whether the number of candidates for the 1982 school board elections did represent a significant increase from previous years, a search was conducted at the public library of the files of Ottawa's two daily newspapers, *The Ottawa Citizen* and *The Ottawa Journal*, the latter of which, ceased publication in 1980. The election results which were published in the newspapers for eight school board elections since 1969 are displayed in FIGURE 1 which appears below.

FIGURE 1

Number of Candidates running for election to the four Ottawa-Carleton School Boards 1969-1982.



The election of trustees to the two new Carleton County school boards was held in 1969 and, for the two City of Ottawa boards, a year later in 1970. Following these initial elections, the trustees of all four school boards in the Ottawa-Carleton region were elected at the same time as other municipal representatives during the "even" years from 1972 to 1982. Each of these elections was for a two-year term, with the exception of 1982, which was for three years. Using the 1969 and 1970 elections as a "benchmark" or as 100%, the variations in the number of candidates for succeeding election years are illustrated in *Table 1*. Any decrease from the benchmark years of 1969 and 1970 is illustrated in brackets ( ).

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TABLE 1

Increase or decrease in the number of school board candidates in the Ottawa-Carleton Region since 1969-70.

Election Year	Number of Candidates	Increase/ (Decrease)	Percentage Increase/ (Decrease)
1972	118	13	12%
1974	106	1	1%
1976	128	23	22%
1978	123	18	17%
1980	100	(5)	(5%)
1982	146	41	39%

Both Figure 1 and Table 1 indicate a significant increase in the number of school board candidates in the Ottawa-Carleton region for 1982. Because the Government of Ontario had decided to increase the term of office for all municipal representatives from two to three years commencing in 1982 and, because it allowed individual school boards to determine the remuneration which they pay their board members, it was assumed that these two factors may have contributed to the increase in the number of candidates who were running for election to the four school boards. In order to test these assumptions, a survey of the new candidates was conducted during the two-week period prior to the elections which were held on November 8, 1982.

METHODOLOGY

Of the 146 candidates who ran for the sixty-eight seats on the four school boards, fifty-six were incumbents and ninety were new candidates, although not necessarily first-time candidates. It was decided that only new candidates would be surveyed: first, because of the relatively short time frame of three weeks between the date nominations closed and election day; and second, although a slightly higher percentage of the incumbents had decided to run for re-election (fifty-six in 1982 compared to fifty in 1980), the significant increase was in the number of non-incumbents. In this light, the ninety challengers in 1982 contrasted with fifty-two in 1980. This represents an increase of forty-two percent from the previous election and forty percent from the election of 1969-1970.

In order to survey this large number of candidates in such a short period of time, the assistance of five educational administration students involved in a Master's programme and in the study of educational politics, volunteered to assist in the development of the questionnaire for the survey and to conduct the interviews under the direction of the principal investigator. Because the largest number of nominations was for the Ottawa Board of Education, two research assistants were assigned to it, and one each to the Ottawa Separate School Board, the Carleton Board of Education, and the Carleton Separate School Board respectively.

Although an in-depth review of the literature was not conducted, research studies reported by several investigators in Ontario and Quebec on trustees and trustee elections were examined. It was from this limited body of literature that the questionnaire for the interviews was developed and the items were reviewed with several former trustees as to their appropriateness. The research studies examined included: a comprehensive survey of 220 candidates for school board on the Island of Montreal in 1977 (Townsend and Craig, 1978); the recruitment of school board members (Cistone, 1974); and a longitudinal profile of elected school board trustees in Ontario (Jakes, 1977, 1982). The questionnaire included certain demographic data such as the candidates' educational background and his or her current occupation as well as any previous experience in political or community associations, formal or informal links with educators and any other possible recruitment as candidates by special interest groups or other trustees. The major assumptions that this unusual increase in the number of candidates was due to higher trustee honoraria or an extension in the term of office from two years to three years were investigated and all new candidates were asked whether either of these two factors directly influenced their decision to run. Questions were raised with respect to other major influences which may have affected their nomination and subsequent candidacy.

Because the candidates were involved in a very short and intensive three-week campaign and would not, in all likelihood, respond to mailed questionnaires, each of the new candidates was contacted personally by one of the research assistants and was interviewed for a period of time ranging from thirty minutes to more than one hour. The interview was either conducted by telephone or in person depending upon the wish of the new candidates. The personal contact allowed the probing of the answers from the respondents and it also assisted in determining the strength of personal convictions which were held by the candidates with respect to particular issues as well as the motivation for their involvement. Responses from the interviews were recorded on special forms which were designed to collect the data.

The methodology employed in this study is a type of qualitative analysis commonly referred to as interpretative-theoretical (de Groot, 1960). It requires the development of research questions from appropriate literature, an analysis of the collected data which involves the systematic listing of factors and identification of relationships, a classification or categorization of the data from the summary listing, and an explanation or interpretation of the findings (de Groot, 1969; Dubin, 1978). In this light, the data were analyzed by listing the responses, classifying them, and interpreting the findings.

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FINDINGS

Of the total sample of ninety new candidates running for election to the sixty-eight seats on the four boards in Ottawa-Carleton, sixty-three (70%) of them were actually contacted and interviewed. The other twenty-seven challengers either refused to take part in the survey or could not be contacted and interviewed during the short time frame of two weeks which was allowed for the data collection.

One introductory question in the survey was designed to identify the candidates who were running for the first time and those who had run previously. The results showed that forty-nine (79%) were, in fact, first-time candidates, eleven (17%) had run on more than one occasion or had been elected previously to the same board or one of the other boards since 1969, and three (5%) refused to answer this question. A second introductory question was structured to determine whether the majority of the new candidates were parents of children who currently attended a school operated by one of the four school boards. Responses to this question indicated that forty (64%) of the new candidates had children enrolled in the board for which they were running and twenty-three (36%) did not. Of those who had children attending school, parents of elementary school children were almost twice the number of parents of secondary school students. Several of the candidates who did not have children attending either elementary or secondary school expressed strong beliefs that in their opinion it was unnecessary to be parents of children currently attending school to be involved in the political process of representing the electors as a school board member. In this light, it is recognized that being a parent is not a requirement in accordance with the *Education Act*, R.S.O. 1978 and, in view of the fact that non-parent ratepayers today may even out-number parent ratepayers in certain jurisdictions, it is interesting to note that the majority of new candidates still come from the parent ratepayer group.

In the development of a longitudinal profile of elected school board trustees in Ontario which utilized the Blishen Scale as the measurement instrument to rank occupations listed in Canadian census reports into six classifications (Blishen, 1968), three previous research studies show that the majority of Ontario's incumbent trustees (75%) are recruited from among the upper three classes of Canadian society (Cistone, 1974; Jakes, 1977, 1982). This upper class domination was also reflected in the occupations of the new candidates who presented themselves to the electorate in Ottawa-Carleton for the 1982 elections. In an analysis of the demographic data which were gathered in this study, more than seventy-five percent of the non-incumbents were also representative of the upper three classes of society and, among the sixty-three candidates who were interviewed, a total of forty-eight (76%) held at least one university degree, sixty-one (97%) had a secondary school education or better, and only two (3%) reported that a basic elementary school education was their highest level of academic achievement.

In this light, upper class domination by trustee nominees and in actual trustee representation, at least in the Ottawa-Carleton Region, continues to follow the American pattern (Zeigler et al, 1977). Although the three Ontario surveys noted earlier reflect a similar pattern, it is not surprising that Ottawa-Carleton, with the Federal Government and high technology industries as the major employers, would demonstrate a very high percentage of professional, well-educated upper class citizens who run for election to school boards. Although the statistics for all four school boards were relatively constant, it should be noted that the non-incumbents for the Ottawa Board of Education had eighty-nine percent (89%) holding at least one university degree. The two county boards, with some rural representation, and the Ottawa Separate School Board had a slightly lower percentage of university-educated candidates but the percentage in all three boards was still quite high.

In a study of school board member recruitment conducted by Cistone (1974) where a stratified random sampling technique was used, it was reported that ninety-three percent of the incumbents had reached their threshold of activity in educational affairs as a direct result of primary group influences such as parents, relatives or close friends in education who facilitated their awareness of, and familiarity with, educational issues (p. 50). When similar educational links were explored with the sixty-three respondents in this survey, it was determined that forty-five (87%) were influenced in their recruitment by direct educational links as eight (13%) were teachers, fifteen (24%) were former teachers, fifteen (24%) had a member of the family who was or is a teacher, and seventeen (27%) were influenced by other educators. Only eight (13%) reported no direct educational influences in their decision to run.

When the respondents were asked whether their decision to run was their own or if they had been pressured into their candidacy by community members or educators, thirty-nine (62%) indicated that the decision was their own, and twenty-two (38%), felt that the pressure to run had come from other educational or community sources.

Cistone (1974) also found, that among the random sample of trustees which he used in his study, ninety-seven of the respondents had been active in some civic, educational, or occupational organization prior to seeking election to the school board (p. 50). In this sample of sixty-three non-incumbents, virtually all of them brought some community or group leadership experience into the campaign. The leadership experiences within the community which where most frequently mentioned included parent associations, service organizations, and community or

recreational groups. In the analysis, it was discovered that many respondents had been involved in more than one organization and *Table 2* below illustrates a total of 114 different leadership experiences among the sixty-three candidates.

TABLE 2

Previous Leadership Experience in Organizations By The Sixty-Three Candidates School Board

Organizations	Ottawa Public	Carleton Public	Ottawa Separate	Carleton Separate	Total
Parent Associations	8	11	4	6	29
Service Organizations	7	10	4	8	29
Recreation Associations	8	9	2	5	24
Municipal Politics	4	4	2	1	11
Unions	3	3	1	3	10
Others	1	4	3	3	11
Totals	31	41	16	26	114

The assumptions that probable increases in trustee honoraria or an extension of the term of office from two to three years were important factors which contributed to the large number of new candidates in the 1982 election are not substantiated by the data. Of the sixty respondents to these questions, only three (5%) would admit that an increase in the stipend was a reason for their candidacy, and only nine (15%) indicated that they were influenced by the longer term of office. These two influences would, of course, be regarded as selfish motives for their candidacy and whether they were factors or not, it does seem ironical that a record number of candidates should come forward subsequent to these two significant changes to school board membership being made. Even when the negative responses to these questions were probed, the candidates continued to deny them as influences and many seemed surprised that trustees received any remuneration at all for this civic duty.

Although the above two factors did not seem to influence their candidacy, other serious concerns which apparently caused them to run emerged from the data and may be, perhaps, of greater interest to present school board incumbents and their respective administrations than the assumptions which led to this study. The key issues which were identified by a majority of the candidates were grouped into major classifications and, in order of frequency, included: 1) a lack of communication between the schools or the school board and themselves as parents or ratepayers respectively; 2) monetary concerns including negative features of fiscal restraint, budgeting, or the high costs of education; 3) an inconsistent application of the policy with respect to school closure and a concern for the community school concept; 4) implementation of Bill 82 and special education; 5) school curriculum including quality education, computer education, and the basics; and 6) with many of the new candidates running for the separate school boards, a demand for public funding up to the end of grade 13 for Catholic education.

In addition to the data which were collected from the interviews with the new candidates, the major classifications of issues were cross-referenced with similar data collected by attendance at all-candidates' meetings, pamphlets produced by the challengers, and a newspaper tabloid outlining their platform which was prepared by reporters from the daily and weekly newspapers. Although communication, fiscal responsibility, and quality education could be dismissed as "motherhood" issues by those involved in school board politics and by present incumbents, the concerns expressed by the new candidates appear to have been strong enough to bring forward a record number for the 1982 election.

CONCLUSION

Of the ninety new candidates who filed nomination papers and ran for trustee on one of the four school boards in Ottawa-Carleton, twenty-three (25%) were elected and eighteen (78%) were successful in their first attempt. Five (22%), had previous experience as a candidate ranging from one to five election attempts. Although all of the election results since 1969-1970 were not analyzed completely, it would appear that a greater number of incumbents were defeated in the 1982 elections. Of the fifty-six incumbents who ran, eleven (20%) were defeated. The success rate for incumbents in both the 1980 and 1978 elections was eighty-six percent compared to eighty percent in 1982.

Why did a record number of new candidates run for the elected position of school trustee in 1982? The data seem to indicate that the increases in honoraria or the term of office apparently were not factors in their decision to become candidates. In fact, many challengers expressed surprises that school board trustees receive remuneration and others suggested that a three-year term would mean an even greater personal commitment in time and community service.

It would appear that among those who are legally qualified to run for trustee by virtue of being Canadian citizens, of the full age of eighteen, and residents and ratepayers within the school section, it is only the socially eligible from more favoured groups (Cistone, 1974, pp. 47-48) who come forward as candidates. The results show that more than seventy-five percent of the new candidates come from the upper three classes of society and hold at least one university degree.

A very close association with education seems to be another influential factor as eighty-seven percent of the non-incumbents had a direct or indirect link with education. It would also appear that those who make the transition from the socially eligibles to candidacy have been politically active in the past in some community group or organization. Virtually all of the candidates had this

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previous leadership experience, and among the sixty-three respondents, 114 instances of previous political involvement were recorded.

Because the major concerns and predominant issues which affected their candidacy were lack of communication, financial, and school closure, school boards particularly in the Ottawa-Carleton Region, would be well advised to re-examine their public relations and communication links with the ratepayers. Many new candidates were deeply concerned with what they perceive to be impersonal community relations, a lack of response to their genuine concerns, and the many difficulties which they have experienced in their attempts to deal with large, impersonal, autocratic, and bureaucratic school systems in general, and the school boards' appointed officials in particular.

Because a stratified random sample of all new candidates in the Province was not used in this study, the results are local and geographical and cannot be generalized to the entire population. The influential factors which emerged from the data were strong enough, however, that other Ontario school boards may wish to reflect upon their public relations' mechanisms and communication links. It would appear that these are major concerns.

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